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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 004683

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TAGS: PREL PARM MARR MCAP AF IR RU PK GG FR

SUBJECT: USD/P EDELMAN AND COUNSELOR COHEN DISCUSS
AFGHANISTAN, ESDP, AND ARMS EXPORTS TO CHINA WITH SENIOR
FRENCH OFFICIALS

REF: PARIS 4677

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT FOR REASO
NS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶11. (S) SUMMARY: Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (USD/P) Eric Edelman and State Department Counselor (C) Eliot Cohen discussed the U.S. desire to develop a three- to five-year strategic vision for the Alliance in Afghanistan with senior French officials on December 5 in Paris. The French were enthusiastic about the proposal, and also welcomed news that the U.S. is supporting Paddy Ashdown for the enhanced senior UN civilian position in Kabul. Senior MFA and Defense officials parried suggestions for further French commitment of forces in Afghanistan, noting that decisions on any increased French military engagement were for President Sarkozy to take, and stressing the need for further elaboration of a strategic framework. The Presidency and the MFA noted French interest in securing U.S. public support for strengthening European defense (ESDP) in connection with France's renewed commitment to NATO; they hoped the issue could be discussed in early 2008. USD/P Edelman noted U.S. concerns with regard to any French consideration of pushing for a lifting of the EU's China arms embargo, citing U.S. security concerns in East Asia and U.S. legal obligations to defend Taiwan. French officials agreed to keep U.S. informed if there of any further evolution in French thinking. (Note: USD/P and C also discussed Iran and the NIE, reported reftel). END SUMMARY

MEETING PARTICIPATION

¶12. (SBU) USD/P Eric Edelman and State Department Counselor Eliot Cohen met with French officials in Paris on December 5 at the Presidency (Francois Richier, Strategic Affairs Counselor, and Colonel Antoine Noguier of the General Staff); the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Philippe Carre, A/S equivalent for Strategic Affairs; Philippe Errera, Counselor to the Minister for Strategic Affairs; Nicolas Niemtchinow, DAS-equivalent for Strategic Affairs; and Martin Briens, DAS equivalent for Disarmament), and the Ministry of Defense (Michel Miraillet, U/S-equivalent for Strategic Affairs). Counselor Cohen met separately with Francis Delon, Secretary-General of the Prime Minister's General Secretariat

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of National Security (SGDN).

¶13. (S) Edelman and Cohen expressed the U.S. desire to develop a three- to five-year strategic vision for the Alliance in Afghanistan. In order to keep allies engaged on the ground, Edelman said, we need to begin to define our goals and the contribution each country makes to our overall strategy. The U.S. hopes for this effort to come together by the Bucharest Summit. French officials expressed enthusiasm for the initiative, noting the GOF view that a strategic discussion on Afghanistan has long been lacking. Miraillet and Carre stressed that formulating and communicating our vision for Afghanistan is a critical piece in convincing public opinion in troop contributing capitals.

¶14. (S) Cohen briefed on his recent visit to Ottawa, noting the high degree of concern in the Canadian government about parliament's renewal of their force's mandate in Afghanistan.

With a panel set to make a report in January, followed by February debate in parliament, NATO support will be critical factor. A major NATO nation stepping forward to work together and alongside the Canadians, Cohen advocated, could powerfully influence the debate in the right direction.

¶15. (S) Richier noted that France had already gone to great lengths to keep the Dutch involved by contributing an OMLT, and confirmed that France was still considering the possibility of a PRT. Carre affirmed that France could not have a "leopard-skin" approach to its involvement in Afghanistan, resulting from efforts to assist other governments convincing their publics to accept a lengthier presence. French troops, Carre argued, should be deployed in a strategic fashion. This will require more internal GOF consideration, likely tied to elaboration of the overall

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strategy -- which will likely not be concluded in time to help the Canadians. Carre, observing that there needs to be a way to get the main "stakeholders" together, on the model of Kosovo or Bosnia. He suggested an early Quad meeting for further discussion.

¶16. (S) Miraillet stated that President Sarkozy would make any decision on increased French engagement in Afghanistan, and that no one knew how far he would be willing to go. He stated that the French chiefs of staff are considering Afghanistan as a training opportunity for French troops, but advised against jumping to conclusions. Miraillet said France feels a great deal of pressure on Afghanistan, both from the U.S. directly, but also because France is one of the few NATO countries with significant capabilities. He highlighted the Ministry's "awful" budget situation and the pending conclusions of France's defense white paper, which will be completed in March. He also added that EUFOR in Chad is "a nightmare" for France, presumably due to the low levels of commitment from other EU member-states.

UN CIVILIAN PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN

¶17. (S) Edelman and Cohen argued that a "super-civilian" UN presence in Afghanistan could boost the international effort to assist the country's development and provide troop-contributing countries with an interlocutor whose agenda matched our own. Cohen emphasized that the U.S. was in no way looking to replace President Karzai, but instead design a senior position that could consult with the allies and create a forum for strategic discussions. Cohen noted that the U.S. was supporting Paddy Ashdown. Carre said the French also supported Ashdown but were unsure if the British themselves approved of his selection.

¶8. (S) Richier and Carre stressed to Edelman and Cohen that strong U.S. public support for increased European defense capabilities through ESDP was critical to France in order for the French to move forward on their "renewed commitment to NATO." Carre said that while the issue was not urgent, he hoped discussions could move ahead early in the new year. The French want to ensure that there are no misgivings on the U.S. side before moving forward. Edelman and Cohen said they looked forward to learning from the French what precisely they had in mind with regard to increased European defense capabilities.

ARMS EXPORTS TO CHINA

¶9. (S) Noting Sarkozy's reference to the EU's China Arms embargo as "anachronistic," Edelman requested that the French consult with the U.S. before taking any initiatives within the EU. He noted abiding regional security concerns, including with regard to China's huge ballistic missile build-up across the straits from Taiwan, and recalled U.S. obligations under the Taiwan Relations Act to defend the island. Responding to Carre's argument that a 1989-vintage embargo based is not the way to control China, Edelman warned against actions that might lead China to misinterpret the international community's resolve regarding Taiwan, especially in the sensitive period ahead. Carre affirmed that he understood U.S. concerns, but noted the growing need for China's cooperation on international issues including Iran, and the need to "fix" the embargo at some point in the future.

¶10. (SBU) USD/P Eric Edelman and State Department Counselor Cohen have cleared this message.

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